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Mao in the mantle of Trotsky

MILITARISATION OF LABOUR

BY VICTOR ZORZA

There is a distinct whiff of Trotskyism in Mao's new ideas on the militarisation of labour as outlined in the Chinese press yesterday.

At the same time Mao's advocacy of the "uninterrupted revolution" calls to mind Trotsky's insistence on the "permanent revolution" which, by keeping the revolutionary pot boiling, was to spread Communism from Russia through Europe to the whole world. The Chinese people, the Peking "Red Flag" says, have grasped Mao's ideas on "uninterrupted revolution"; they want no pause in the course of the revolution and they believe that "the more rapidly the revolution advances, the more benefits they will derive."

The references to the militarisation of labour occur in the same passage, and the association of them with Trotsky's ideas is irresistible, a though it is only Communist leaders who have fallen from favour that run the risk of being branded as Trotskyites.

"People as a whole"

China's "gradual transition to communism in the near future"—something that even the Russians are chary of claiming for their own progress—will be achieved, according to the Peking "People's Daily" after the new communes have in about six years' time "transformed collective ownership into ownership by the people as a whole."

The distinction between the two types of ownership is that the co-operative farms, which are now being turned into communes, own "collectively" as a unit their means of production. Under the new system, however, they will not dispose of their own property, not even "collectively," for this will be vested in the communes and through them in the "people as a whole," that is in the State.

The distinction is a fine one but in Communist theory it heralds the arrival at the higher stage of communism. In Russia recently when tractors and agricultural machinery were handed over to the collective farms, some of the opposition to Mr Khrushchev's scheme was on the ground that he was strengthening the "collective" form of ownership, instead of turning the collective farms into State farms, which would have made them national property and thus brought the Communist millennium nearer.

In China it will still take "a number of years" after the establishment of the communes to bring about communism proper, on the principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

Quick withering

The "People's Daily" looks forward to the time when "the State's functions will be limited to protecting the country from external aggression, but will play no role at home. Then, and only then, will Chinese society enter the era of communism." But how people should be put off by a prospect that under Mao's leadership twenty years are concentrated into one day and that therefore "one can visualise the gradual transition of our country from socialism to communism."

Indeed people are told that they can already see "the budding sprouts

of communism" in the system of food distribution in the communes where the staple foods, it is explained, are given "free." The food is "free" to the extent that no money changes hands, but there is, of course, a catch in it. The commune management issues coupons for the staple grain foods to its members, "according to their individual consumption standards," which means according to the commune's estimate of their needs.

At the "people's mess hall," the members will pay with the coupons for the grain they consume, but any meat or vegetables they may want must be paid for by hard cash. The coupons are thus part of the wages earned by the members, but it is stipulated at the same time that the members will receive only 80 per cent of their wages. The remaining 20 per cent will be kept back by the commune to form a "bonus fund" to encourage the best workers.

Robbing the poor

Deductions for tax, welfare levies, and other funds started by the commune will also be made from the 80 per cent wage. But only about half of the commune's members will be eligible for the bonuses, so that those who do not make the grade will in effect be subsidising from their own wages the more diligent.

The new system can perhaps be best understood from a description given in the press of a model commune in Honan, which was formed in April out of 27 collective farms. The Welshing commune, which means "Sputnik," now consists of 9,300 households, comprising 43,000 members.

These have been organised into 37 production brigades, and the merger itself is said to have been decided upon in order to cope with "the increasing demands of industrial construction" and "to solve short-comings involving manpower and materials." Since the formation of the commune "more than 1,100 factories have gone into production," 260 communal mess halls have been established, and several nurseries and kindergartens opened.

A force of militia 2,400 strong has been organised "to protect industry and agriculture." This suggests that there is more than one policeman for every twenty members of the commune although the policemen probably also have to work in the same way as the others.

Decline so far

The party decision published yesterday in the "People's Daily" says that the peasants' private plots "may" be turned over to the communes, but in those already established this has in fact been done. Mao Tse-tung thus scores another victory over Khrushchev in their competition for who will be the first to lead their people to communism, but in Russia the stubborn resistance of the peasants has so far enabled them to retain their plots.

On the details so far given, it is legitimate to doubt the practicability of Mao's scheme, and the economic efficiency of any system organised in this way. Against this, however, it must be remembered that the scheme will embrace a peasant population of 500 million, which has so far proved itself docile in face of the demands made by the party.